**How to write a formal letter?**

**Some useful tips**

**Letterheads and Return-Address Heading**

Most business letters are typed on stationery with a letterhead, that is, with a printed name and address of an organization, company, or business. Thus, the placement of the sender's address usually will be predetermined. If you are using letterhead, you need to add only the date.

If there is no letterhead, place your return-address heading (which gives your address but not your name) at least an inch from the top of the page. In the block style letter, the lines of the return-address heading align at the left margin. In the modified block style letter and indented style letter, the lines fall to the right of the center of the page. Alignment is still on the left.

**Dateline**

American: May 22,1995

Britain: 22 May 1995

People in **Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and South America** generally use the **British dateline**. **Canadians** tend to use **both**.

**Inside Address**

This shows the name, title, and address of the person you are writing to. Place this information anywhere from three to twelve lines below the date, depending on the length of your letter. The shorter the letter, the more space there should be between the date and the inside address. In all three styles of letters, the inside address falls at the left margin of the page. You also have to make sure that the spelling of the name of the person receiving your letter, as well as his or her title and address are correct.

**Salutations**

Salutation greets the addressee. In all three styles it falls at the left margin, two lines below the inside address and two lines above the body of the letter. It is followed by a comma, a colon, or no punctuation (British style). For a man, the standard salutation is Dear Mr. For a woman, the tendency is to use Ms. since it avoids the question of whether the person is married (Mrs.) or unmarried (Miss). If you are addressing someone whose name or gender you don't know, use Dear Sir or Dear Madam.

**Subject Line**

Many business letters begin with RE:, or SUBJECT, which states what the letter is going to be about. This gives information without first having to read the entire letter. It is placed two spaces below the salutation and two spaces above the body of the letter. (See example 1.)

**The Body**

The body of the letter, containing its substance, aligns on the left in all three styles of letters. However, instead of indenting the first line of each paragraph, as in the indented style letter, place an extra line of space between paragraphs.

**Complementary Closings**

The closing of a letter starts two lines below the last line of the body and aligns with the return-address heading. In the block style it aligns at the left margin (example l); in the modified block style and indented style letters it falls to the right of the center of the page, but alignment is still on the left. (examples 2 and 3)

The closings can be characterized by their degree of formality. Notice that only the first word of the closing is capitalized, and it is followed by a comma, typical of American correspondence. In British style correspondence there is no punctuation following the closing.

**Less formal**: *Sincerely, Sincerely yours, Yours sincerely*

These are the standard closings for an **American** business letter.

**More formal**: *Respectfully yours, Yours respectfully, Yours truly*

The **British** tend to be **more formal** and thus use these complimentary closings more often than Americans do. These are also **standard** closings for letters beginning with **Dear Sir, Dear Madam, or Dear Sir or Madam.**

**Signature**

The signature of a business letter follows the closing. It consists of your typed name (the fourth line below the closing phrase) and your handwritten signature (only your name, not your title) is between the closing and the typed name.

**Examples of letters**

There are three basic letter formats used:

* (1) *block style*, in which all the lines begin at the left-hand margin;
* (2) *modified block style*, in which the dateline, the return-address heading, the complimentary close, and the sender's name and title at the end begin in the center of the page; and
* (3) *indented*(also called *modified block with paragraph indentations*), in which each first line of a new paragraph , is indented five spaces and the sender's address and date are placed on the upper right-hand side of the page.

Letters 1 through 3 give you examples of all three styles of letter.

Note that the first letter, from Miguel Fuentes, uses closed punctuation typical of American correspondence. This means that commas are used after the greeting and closing and that there is a comma between the date and the year. The second letter, from Uwe Stein, uses punctuation typical of the British correspondence style with no punctuation after the greeting and closing and no comma in the dateline. Note also the different order of the dates in American versus British writing.

================ **Block Style Letter** ===================

**This is the standard form in Britain, Europe, South America, Australia, and New Zealand**.

Hotel de la Playa   
Avenida de la Playa 108   
SP-03080 Alicante   
Spain

October 23, 1998

Ms. Margaret Smith, Director of Tour Operations  
Sun and Fun Tours  
25 Hammersmith Road  
Harlow, Essex CM19 5AA  
England

Dear Ms. Smith,

RE: Delays in Completion of Construction at Hotel de la Playa

We have recently been informed by our contractor that he will not be able to meet his promised schedule for completion of the modernization of our hotel. We deeply regret this occurrence for both our guests' and your sake. We wish that there was something that could be done, but the causes of this unfortunate event are outside of our control. A combination of inclement weather and a strike have delayed completion of the repairs. Naturally, we will do our utmost to limit the impact of this work on our guests, and I can assure you that we will pressure the contractors to complete the work as soon as possible. Realistically, however, we cannot expect the work to be completed until the end of January.

As both our interests are to ensure that our guests enjoy their vacation, I would appreciate it if you could contact me so that we can coordinate our efforts to achieve this goal.

Sincerely,

***Miguel Fuentes***

Miguel Fuentes, Manager

============ **Modified Block Style Letter**==================

Abenteuer Urlaub, GmbH

Kaiser Str. 190

D-60437 Frankfurt

Germany

24 October 1999

The Honorable Dr. Emarmel N'Komo

Minister of Commerce

Ministry Building

Zanira

Zanir

Dear Sir

I am writing this inquiry in hopes that we can establish a relationship that will be of benefit to your beautiful country and to our guests, who would enjoy staying in such beautiful surroundings. While on a visit to your neighboring country, Mandika, I had the opportunity to spend several days in your country. I inquired about tourist facilities and discovered that they were yet undeveloped. Naturally, I thought that your country could certainly benefit from the popularity that its beauty would create among potential tourists and the income that they would bring.

Abenteuer Urlaub has established several holiday resorts in Africa with great benefit to the host countries in terms of job creation and revenue generation. There is great potential in both of these areas for a country with such natural beauty as yours. I would thus appreciate the opportunity to present our concept to your ministry in hopes that we can establish a mutually beneficial business relationship.

I look forward to hearing from you and having the possibility of presenting our ideas.

Yours faithfully

Uwe Stein

Uwe Stein,

Manager,

Tourist Product Development

================= **Indented Style Letter** =================

**This is the standard form used in India, Canada, the United States, and Africa.**

Ministry of Commerce

The State of India

Udyod Bhawan

New Dehli 110011

India

February 13, 1997

Mr. Hans Brand

Chemi Suisse

Hauptbahnstr. 23

Ch-4000 Basel

Switzerland

Dear Sir :

The recent tragedy has raised the question of your company's concern for the life and health of our people. There can be no other explanation than gross negligence and total unconcern. When we originally established our business relationship, you assured me that everything would be done to ensure that such a tragedy, which has now occurred, would not occur. It appears that you did not even install an early warning system in our plant, as you have done in your Swiss plant. I can only interpret this as a total disregard for our people and a denial of everything we were promised during our original negotiations.

I cannot describe the suffering that your company's negligence has caused the local population and the effects this negligence will have for generations. We expect that the people involved be compensated for their suffering. The Indian government will hold you totally responsible for the suffering and damage, which is a result of your negligence. Furthermore, our lawyers will contact you in the course of next month.

Yours faithfully,

S. M. Singh

S. M. Singh,

Minister of Commerce